

Editorial

This is the first newsletter to appear since the last AGM. Accordingly this issue contains several reports of workshops at that conference and the financial statement. There was a strong Health subgroup presence at the conference and this newsletter concentrates mainly on health issues, with support from Ian Diamond's article on Lost Opportunities, and Jeff Cloves on Market Research.

This is also the first newsletter since the UK elections. My main reaction is one of anger, not of despair or disappointment. Jeff Cloves in his article reminds us that the main purpose of market research is to acquire information to more efficiently sell products. The Tory campaign reminded me that the main purpose of advertising is to mislead the target group (often in a "you'll be healthy, wealthy and sexually successful if you buy our product" fashion), not to inform them. The Tory billboard poster about increasing the size of the police force presented it as a success. Surely if a government had policies that decreased the crime level, then they should be able to boast about how they were able to decrease the size of the police force. The poster comparing the size of a bulldog, poodle and dachshund would be a suitable candidate for any book on misleading statistics, especially if one also included comparative figures for the West German, French and British economies over the 1979-1987 years.

On the night itself I recalled the "you can fool some of the people all the time" quote and felt like adding "and you can always buy some of them as well" when I saw the figures on voting patterns within the set of first-time shareholders. Of course, tory voters tend to have more money and are consequently more able (and willing) to buy shares, but I will remember for a long time the government selling our collective shares in BT, using our money to finance a £7 million campaign extolling the virtues of capitalism. That was when the election campaign started. Compare that figure with the amount that the non-conservative parties had to spend during the election period.

But what about the records of the election. The Thatcher hat-trick - taking from the cloth caps and giving to the top hats. Re-elected despite record unemployment. But, at last, some parliamentary representation for non-whites. Britain's first black woman MP, with three other non-white MPs as well - all Labour Party. Roughly 0.5% of parliament. Ten percent of black candidates elected compared to roughly 20% of white candidates. This is representative democracy?

But, even if all voters had equal representation, we should not lose sight of the fact that real democracy means equality of power, freedom from exploitation, social and systemic support to enable ALL people to lead fruitful lives both individually and in concert.

The fight for that future needs our anger and our abilities. It needs our publication of information, the facts and their interpretation. It needs us to point out when inequality masquerades as freedom, when cuts are portrayed as spending, when lost opportunities for millions in the population are presented as good management or essentials for a healthy economy, when exploitation by class, region, gender or race are hidden from the rest of the population. The two new publications "Figuring out Education Spending" and "Facing the figures" and the publications to follow will aid us and others in the struggle. Let us continue our work.

Dave Saunders, London, June 1987